Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 19 Number 10 September 2022

FIELD TRIP-1: Sunday, 11th September 2022: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Meeting Point-1: Mangatrai Pearls, Punjagutta, 4.45AM; Meeting Point-2: Opp. Dindigul Air Force Station, 5.45AM. Trip Coordinator(s): Sathwik Reddy (Mobile: 9985807186), Gokul Krishna Addanki (Mobile: 9945346585)

Located in Medak District, Narsapur Reserve Forest is about 50km from Hyderabad and spans over 3500 hectares. The forest has a diverse range of flora and wildlife, various natural rock formations and ponds, and is a dry deciduous forest known for several medicinal plants. The highlight is a cosy lake tucked away in the heart of the forest where we can just sit by to admire the serenity and tranquillity of the place while observing waterfowl. We will look out for Jerdon's Nightjar, Jerdon's Leafbird, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker etc, as also the winter migrants that may have started arriving by now.

This will be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast/snacks, and rain gear if required. Strict Covid protocols will be followed, so please ensure you wear masks, carry a sanitiser and maintain social distancing. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Deccan Birders T-Shirts and caps will be available for sale.

FIELD TRIP-2: Sunday, 25th September 2022: Details to be announced

Trip Report: Zaheerabad, August 28, 2022

Neil Rahul Gala

White-bellied Minivet male (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Early on the morning of August 28, 2022, a group of Deccan Birders members set out to Zaheerabad for our monthly outing. It was a half-day trip, which would maybe offer a lot of surprises. All of us met at the first meeting point, which was BHEL, and then at the second one, which was the Taj Dhaba, where we all got down and had a chat. After a short while, once everyone had gathered, we resumed our journey.

We soon reached our destination, and immediately saw a couple of Tricolored Munias, a lifer for me. There were some spots where it seemed like it had rained the previous night, and I was just hoping that the rain did not cross paths with us. I was excited to see what surprises were waiting for me. After parking the cars we started our search for the main protagonist of the trip, the White-bellied Minivet.

Grey-breasted Prinia (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

We entered the area and started looking for the Minivet. Once we thought we heard the Minivet, but it turned out to be just the Grey-breasted Prinia mimicking its call – we saw it fly over our heads and disappear into the greens.

Indian Silverbill (Photo: Neil Rahul Gala)

Indian Robin (Photo: Asif Husain Arastu)

There were fields around the patch of land where we were birding and a lot of calls were heard from the fields. After a lot of walking, and seeing many of the common yet beautiful birds, I bumped into Sathwik Uncle, who told me about a fox that he saw. Later on I saw the fox for the first time in a photograph taken by Abhishek Uncle.

Indian Fox (Photo: Abhishek Shroti)

Common Woodshrike (Photo: Neil Rahul Gala)

Small Minivet male (Photo: Neil Rahul Gala)

Jacobin Cuckoo (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

I wandered around some more, and saw my second lifer, the Jacobin Cuckoo. Later on the search for the main target continued. I can say that I was fortunate enough to see the beauty that everyone had come for.

White-bellied Minivet female (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Common Iora (Photo: Asif Husain Arastu)

Bay-backed Shrike (Photo: Abhishek Shroti)

Some time later, we started moving back to where the cars were parked. On the way back, we saw the Indian Fox for the second time, along with a few more birds.

Red-vented Bulbul (Photo: Neil Rahul Gala)

Baya Weaver (Photo: Asif Husain Arastu)

Bonelli's Eagle (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Jungle Babbler (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

While we were waiting for the rest of the group to get back, we saw something soaring high in the air – it was the Bonelli's Eagle. We ended the trip with a couple of nice group photographs, and a tally of some brilliant sightings.

Common Hoopoe (Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

The group at Zaheerabad (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

While going back, all of us stopped for breakfast, had a good meal and then dispersed.

The full list of birds seen during the trip is given below:

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Indian Peafowl	*Pavo cristatus*	18	Red-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus indicus*
2	Painted Francolin	*Francolinus pictus*	19	Little Egret	*Egretta garzetta*
3	Rock Bush Quail	*Perdicula argoondah*	20	Indian Pond Heron	*Ardeola grayii*
4	Blue Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	21	Black-headed Ibis	*Threskiornis melanocephalus*
5	Eurasian Collared Dove	*Streptopelia decaocto*	22	Black-winged Kite	*Elanus caeruleus*
6	Spotted Dove	*Streptopelia chinensis*	23	Changeable Hawk Eagle	*Nisaetus cirrhatus*
7	Laughing Dove	*Streptopelia senegalensis*	24	Bonelli's Eagle	*Aquila fasciata*
8	Greater Coucal	*Centropus sinensis*	25	Shikra	*Accipiter badius*
9	Jacobin Cuckoo	*Clamator jacobinus*	26	Common Hoopoe	*Upupa epops*
10	Asian Koel	*Eudynamys scolopaceus*	27	White-throated Kingfisher	*Halcyon smyrnensis*
11	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	*Cacomantis passerinus*	28	Green Bee-eater	*Merops orientalis*
12	Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo	*Surniculus dicruroides*	29	Coppersmith Barbet	*Psilopogon haemacephalus*
13	Common Hawk Cuckoo	*Hierococcyx varius*	30	Rose-ringed Parakeet	*Psittacula krameri*
14	Little Swift	*Apus affinis*	31	Plum-headed Parakeet	*Psittacula cyanocephala*
15	Asian Palm-Swift	*Cypsiurus balasiensis*	32	White-bellied Minivet	*Pericrocotus erythropygius*
16	Crested Treeswift	*Hemiprocne coronata*	33	Small Minivet	*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
17	Yellow-wattled Lapwing	*Vanellus malabaricus*	34	Black-headed Cuckooshrike	*Lalage melanoptera*

Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl No	Species Name	Scientific Name
35	Common Woodshrike	*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*	55	Red-rumped Swallow	*Cecropis daurica*
36	Common Iora	*Aegithina tiphia*	56	Red-vented Bulbul	*Pycnonotus cafer*
37	White-spotted Fantail	*Rhipidura albogularis*	57	Yellow-eyed Babbler	*Chrysomma sinense*
38	White-browed Fantail	*Rhipidura aureola*	58	Indian White-eye	*Zosterops palpebrosus*
39	Black Drongo	*Dicrurus macrocercus*	59	Puff-throated Babbler	*Pellorneum ruficeps*
40	White-bellied Drongo	*Dicrurus caerulescens*	60	Jungle Babbler	*Argya striata*
41	Brown Shrike	*Lanius cristatus*	61	Brahminy Starling	*Sturnia pagodarum*
42	Bay-backed Shrike	*Lanius vittatus*	62	Common Myna	*Acridotheres tristis*
43	Long-tailed Shrike	*Lanius schach*	63	Indian Robin	*Copsychus fulicatus*
44	Rufous Treepie	*Dendrocitta vagabunda*	64	Oriental Magpie Robin	*Copsychus saularis*
45	House Crow	*Corvus splendens*	65	Pied Bushchat	*Saxicola caprata*
46	Large-billed Crow	*Corvus macrorhynchos*	66	Thick-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum agile*
47	Cinereous Tit	*Parus cinereus*	67	Pale-billed Flowerpecker	*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*
48	Indian Bushlark (Aka Red-winged Bushlark)	*Mirafra erythroptera*	68	Purple-rumped Sunbird	*Leptocoma zeylonica*
49	Common Tailorbird	*Orthotomus sutorius*	69	Purple Sunbird	*Cinnyris asiaticus*
50	Grey-breasted Prinia	*Prinia hodgsonii*	70	Baya Weaver	*Ploceus philippinus*
51	Jungle Prinia	*Prinia sylvatica*	71	Indian Silverbill	*Euodice malabarica*
52	Ashy Prinia	*Prinia socialis*	72	Scaly-breasted Munia	*Lonchura punctulata*
53	Plain Prinia	*Prinia inornata*	73	Tricolored Munia	*Lonchura malacca*
54	Zitting Cisticola	*Cisticola juncidis*	74	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	*Gymnoris xanthocollis*

Some other photos taken during the trip:

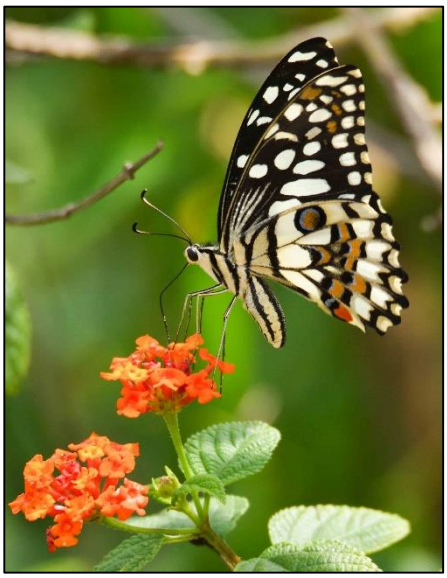
Common Hawk Cuckoo
(Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Green Bee-eater
(Photo: Neil Rahul Gala)

White-bellied Drongo
(Photo: Dr Chitra Shanker)

Blue Pansy (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Flame Lily (*Gloriosa superba*) (Photo: Sravan Kumar R)



Lime Butterfly
(Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Long-tailed Shrike
(Photo: Sravan Kumar R)

Black Drongo
(Photo: Asif Husain Arastu)

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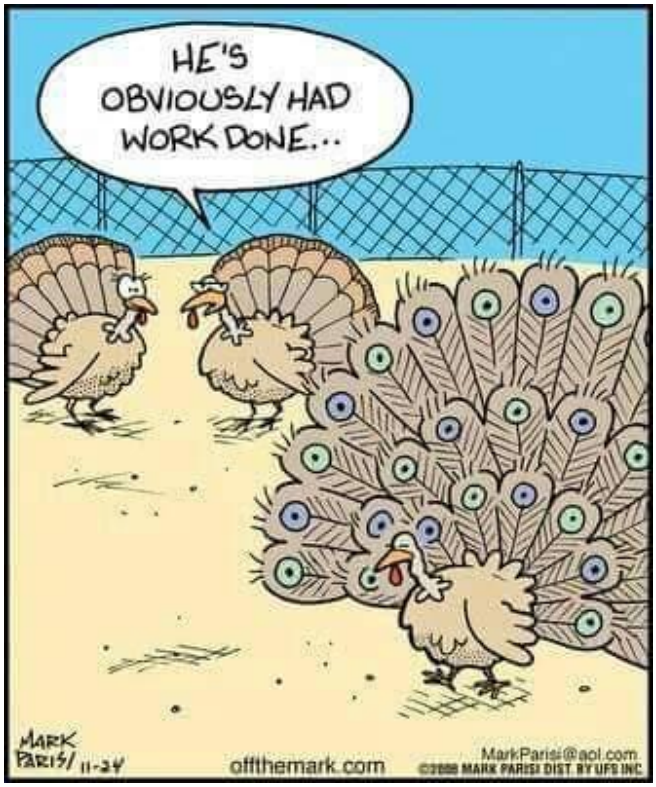
Bird Humour

Umesh Mani



(Received on WhatsApp, October 26, 2021)

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Report: Sighting of Little Egret dark morph, Hyderabad, August 29-30, 2022

Text & Photos: Dr Chitra Shanker

Little Egret dark morph

A dark morph of the Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* was observed in the rice fields of ICAR-Indian Institute of Rice Research on ICRISAT campus (17.49ºN, 74.27ºE), Hyderabad, Telangana, India, on 29 and 30th August 2022.

At first sight, it appeared like a Reef Egret, but the upper mandible was seen to be uniformly dark. The completely yellow feet and the narrow plumes on the nape suggest a Little Egret.

There are some mentions of a dark morph of the Little Egret in recent literature:

1. The article by Ramit Singal on the Birdcount website (https://birdcount.in/little-reef-egrets/) mentions it to be relatively rare.

2. Putative hybrids between a Little Egret and a Western Reef Heron *E. gularis*, which have shadowy and sometimes blotchy plumage colours, have been reported from India.

3. A dark morph Little Egret has also been reported from Uttar Pradesh earlier (https://indianbirds.in/pdfs/IB_17_3_Chauhan_LittleEgret.pdf).

4. Wikimedia commons has an upload of a dark morph from Kannur in Kerala (https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a3/Little_egret_dark_morph_5.jpg), though the colouration is not as dark as the bird observed here.

5. However, the dark morph observed at Embilikala, Sri Lanka (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Little_Egret-_Grey_morph_1.jpg) looks similar to the bird observed now.

The present bird was a little skittish and disturbed easily, and also stayed aloof from the other Little Egrets in the field.

Little Egret white morph

Little Egret dark morph

Whether the putative dark morph is a hybrid of Reef Egret and Little Egret needs to be ascertained.

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photo: Umesh Mani

White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*)

White-eared Bulbul (Gujarat, September 22, 2021)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Pycnonotidae
Genus: *Pycnonotus*
Species: *P. leucotis*
Size: 20 cm

Description & distribution: The White-eared Bulbul is a typical bulbul, somewhat rotund in appearance, and has an overall brownish-grey body. Underparts are a lighter dull greyish white. It has a black head, chin and throat, with a large white cheek spot, due to which it is also known as the White-cheeked Bulbul. The crest is usually a rounded black tuft, but sometimes may be longer and forward-pointing. The bill is short and black, eye rings are bare brownish or yellowish, legs are black and vent is bright yellow. The tail is relatively long, starting off as black or dark brown and ending in white tail-tips. The sexes are alike.

The White-eared Bulbul is a resident in most parts of its range across south-western Asia, from the western parts of India like Gujarat and Rajasthan, west through Pakistan, southern Afghanistan, coastal Iran, Kuwait, most parts of the two-river basin in Iraq, and the island of Bahrain, where it is the national bird. It is also an introduced species in the other Arabian Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE and Qatar, and is popular as a pet in many countries in its range.

Two sub-species are recognized, the nominate *P. l. leucotis*, and *P. l. Mesopotamia*, slightly heavier than the nominate, and seen in north-eastern Arabia, southern Iraq and south-western Iran.

Habitat & behaviour: The White-eared Bulbul is a lowland species of tropical dry forests, scrub, forest edges, agricultural areas, parks and gardens, and can also be seen quite easily in urban areas in its range. It is usually seen singly or in pairs, although occasionally it does form small flocks, twittering together as they hop around in the branches. Its diet primarily consists of fruits on trees, like berries, dates and figs, and pea-like vegetables; it also consumes nectar, insects, and food on the ground. It is a fairly tame bird, accustomed to human presence, and is also known to enter houses to be fed or for kitchen scraps. Its flight is typically bulbul-like, undulating with intermittent wingbeats. Its call is a low raspy *chuk*, but it does not generally call very often. The song is also not consistent, comprising of a set of melodious notes which it may utter in different combinations; however, the song is described as 'pleasant and fluid'.

Nesting: The White-eared Bulbul breeds generally between March and September, with some local variations. It is monogamous and territorial, defending its territory aggressively against other males nearby. The nest is an untidy cup made of twigs, rootlets, dry grass and plant fibres, concealed in thorny bushes or small trees, usually under 2 metres. The usual clutch consists of 3-4 pinkish-white eggs, profusely blotched with purplish-brown patches. Parental duties are shared by both parents.

Local name: The White-eared Bulbul is known as *'Safed kaan bulbul'* in Hindi, *'Kanara bulbul, 'Kachchi bulbul'* or *'Ran bulbul'* in Gujarati; *'Bhooroo'* in Sindhi, *'Safed gallacha bulbul'* in Marathi and *'Shwet karna bulbul'* in Sanskrit.

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